

John K. Teves

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

John K. Teves (JT)

Pukalani, Maui

July 17, 1998

BY: Jeanne Johnston (JJ)

JJ: This is an interview with John K. Teves, at his home in Pukalani, on Maui. The date is Friday, July the 17th, 1998 and the interviewer is Jeanne Johnston.

John, would you give me your full name and when and where you were born?

JT: My name is John Kelly Teves, and I'm not Irish. The Kelly was my godfather. He was an Irish man. I was born in Kapa'a, Kaua'i, on August 27, 1928.

JJ: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JT: I had five sisters and two brothers. Why my parents adopted three other children, I had no idea, because we never had much food for eight to start with. But, they couldn't see children suffer, and this particular—this guy was a war veteran, and he had shell shock. And he was a policeman and one day he took this .45 and blew out his brains. So we took the kids. And one of the kids was my age. His name was Albert, and he was my best friend in life. He's not around anymore, but I'll meet someplace.

JJ: And you were living in Kapa'a at that time?

JT: Kapa'a, at Kapa'a. When they say Kapa'a, it's the town. Kapahi is up towards the mountain. We were called the mountain—country jacks because we lived near the mountain.

JJ: And let's see, that was—did you go to school in that area, also?

JT: Yeah. We went to school, and at that time very few people owned cars. And those who had cars would not pick children up. So from where we lived in Kapahi, every day we'd walk five miles to school. There were no buses. Five miles to school and five miles back. And later on, then our transportation—especially the boys, not the girls. Like you know my family we had myself and Albert—one of the adopted was my age. My brother Hal was the oldest in the family, and one of the adopted was Charlie. And before, we'd share our horse. No saddle, bareback. And the two youngest would sit third and fourth on the horse's back. Because it's not very good to be one and two because the horse, when it gets tired, they turn around and nip. He can nip the first guy and the second guy but he can't get the third. The last guy behind would make it a habit to always reach his hand back and hold the tail. And there were times the fourth guy's hand could be messy. (Chuckles) But we would reach school, and you know we would tie the horse. There's lot of

water in Kaua‘i, lot of *hanawai* ditches. *Hanawai* ditch means places the plantation the natural [tape inaudible] they raise cane. So we’d tie the horse. Had grass to eat and water to drink. That was free transportation. And when we got through school we’d jump on the horse back and go home.

JJ: What school did you go to?

JT: Kapa‘a School. There were no Catholic schools there. Later on, there was a Catholic school.

JJ: Now, what was your dad’s name?

JT: My dad’s name was John and those days they take the mother’s name. His mother’s last name was Rapoza. So then they don’t do it anymore. I think in my father’s time, he would take his father’s last name, of course. But his middle name would be his mother’s maiden name. But in my generation, they pretty much change. Like I said, my Kelly is my Irish godfather. But since later on when the Portuguese would always name a—the middle name would always be a patron saint. So when you’re in a jam, always call your patron saint. Sounds corny, but I’ve done it quite often, and it works.

JJ: Good idea. Okay, and what was your dad doing when you were born?

JT: Well, that was about the happiest time there was. There was no money. We never had money. And county, you work in the county, gave you the bare necessities. And like how I said, I was born in 1928 and I was the fourth of eight. And you know what happened in 1932, the depression. Then after that they made the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. Any type of work we would go work two days county and you’d go WPA. But it’s sad that the kids today, never knew what I knew and did. We had an area of about twenty-four acres. We had our own milking cows, and I milked when I was a little boy. We had hogs, we had a lot of chickens. When I say “lot of chickens,” none was in coops. All running around. And those days, eleven kids never used slippers. So along the steps there were two, big five-gallon buckets, and you know what you had to wash off. But if you decided you wanted to find eggs, you could go out on any given day and find about ten dozen eggs. And the way you find eggs is you just go on the pastures and you look on bush. And you open the bush and see the nest over there. You know, more like Easter all year round, plenty eggs.

We had at least two acres garden. We raised sweet potatoes and at that time you could come over my house and you could buy one bag of sweet potatoes for fifty cents. We raise our corn, we dry our own corn, crack the corn for the chickens. We had our own cocoa, cocoa trees, about four or five different varieties. We dry our own cocoa bean. We had our own coffee. We dried the coffee, cherry coffee. We roast the coffee. What else? We had our own grapes, was not very nice to say but we made our own wine. And they say the kids’ legs, the best to squeeze the grapes because they don’t develop toe jams, yet. So I remember—especially the boys and the girls—nobody wanted that. They said, “Come here,” and those days they had the big bar soap. And with the scrub brush they scrub your legs and you stay all day like this. They had the wine room.

I never learned to eat papayas. Because, you know like today they say that’s Solo papaya. And if you come from the Big Island, they got thousands of acres Solo papaya. Because it’s sweet. The papaya is pretty high in sugar content. I always thought, from little boy, that papaya was made for hogs, because those days you had big varieties that go ten, fifteen pounds. And I would poke ‘em with the stick, chop ‘em up in the wheelbarrow, and throw one hand middling inside and take the

leaves of the sweet potato, Portuguese call that *rama*, the leaves. Pigs used to like that.

You name and we kept that. I mean every little kid has his chores. He had to do this. You see one kid see one cow nowadays and the kid turn around and run. My job is when the cow drop the calf, my job was to take the wheelbarrow, go out in the pasture—the cows have a way of hiding their calf, but you know when you getting hot because they watching you. And as soon as they see that you going direct then they step, you know, moo and run. And the calf will answer. And when they drop the calf, the flies like the calf and they lay their eggs, so you know, maggots form. So the mother cleans the calf but not as clean as it should be. Not mothers are perfect, okay? And I would put the calf in the wheelbarrow. Now what kid today would pick up a calf, the mother mooing and nudging you with her head, put 'em in the wheelbarrow, take 'em to the milking barn? Because the first four days, you cannot drink the milk. I don't know if you know that. Because the milk has still have blood on. And you just have to strip that, let the calf drink that. And about four days afterwards, if you can see no red on, the milk is okay.

We made our own—we couldn't buy soda water—we made our own soda. My mother used to buy the hops and make their own beer. With the---we had one Guernsey cow and one Jersey cow. Those are high butterfat content cows. And she made her own cheeses. You know, with cheese cloth, you hang the milk in this cheese cloth behind the door, and you put one pan to catch 'em. Who would do that, today? We couldn't afford to buy ice cream. We never had money. But she made it, you know, made the ice cream. But we wanted can goods. Can goods was in when we were kids. We made our own, you know, the blood sausage. And I would hate the job of cleaning the intestines. Terrible, yeah? And I would take lime or what they call the *wai* lemon and I would scrub. And they were clean people. You had to scrub, scrub with lemon. You name it, and we made it, okay?

We never buy watercress, we had pure water—7, neutral, 7.0 is neutral—running through our place. We raise our own watercress. You name the vegetable and we raised the vegetable. But we lacked money.

After you finish taping, I'll tell you a story of other ways I had of getting to school in the morning. But it's not nice on tape. But today, all my grandchildren, when they turn fifteen. . . . The Lord was nice to me, was kind to me. I'm not a holy man but my wife is a holy woman. (Chuckles) But when my grandchildren turned fifteen and they go for their license I buy all of them cars. And it's amazing that if you tell them go from here to the shopping center right up here. They can't walk. They need a car. So one other thing is, if you—well, you're just a little young yet, but I'm seventy already. But nearly seventy. Those days, they had drugs, okay? Those days, all the people from China—they call 'em coolies—they had that big hats like this. And we knew they smoke opium, we know they had marijuana. But they never want let kids come around you. They would say, "Go home, go home." In other words, they never would peddle their wares. Yet the kids was happy, we'd all make, you know, make their own stuff. When you. . . .

JJ: What kind of games did you play?

JT: Well, my grandson just graduated, Shawn. I'll show you. See, there he's going to San Francisco University, University of San Francisco. Premed. He's very smart boy. I wrote this long letter to him telling him the hardships, you know of *da kine*. But the games, one of this I wrote, every month, we would kill a pig. Amazingly, every kid had his favorite pig, 'cause he used to feed 'em. They lose themselves when the hog was going to get butchered. Or we would talk our parents into trading that one for something else, and kill the other one. So we had, you see, pet

becomes part of the family, so you can never can get too much attached to this animal. The purpose was to eat. They were food. So we try not to get attached but sometime you might get one litter of ten pigs. And all die except one survive and the mother might die and that pig think that you his mother or father and he's attached to you. He don't believing he should be living in one pig pen. So you let 'em loose in the yard. So you have to watch him, because he'll follow you to school. And it's not only the hogs, it's the calves or the goats. Goats especially. So once you get attached to them. That's what the amazing part is, 4-H kids, yeah? I would see them groom the young heifers or young steers. And I was amazed when I talked to them. "What happened to your steer?"

"My dad had it and butchered."

"Where is he now?"

"In the freezer."

And I said, "How is the meat?"

And he says, "It tastes good I think." What an animal that kid is, he's worse than an animal. Because you have any kind feeling, you cannot. There's no way. And even I was so young, I would tell my father, "You know, why don't you trade him to somebody else?" And they would understand, and they would trade.

JJ: Do you have any children?

JT: If I have any children?

JJ: How many?

JT: I have three boys and two girls.

JJ: And your wife's name?

JT: My wife's name is Laverne Teves [LT]. Laverne Teves. Her name---her maiden name was Ebinger in German. The island of Kaua'i. Her father is half-Portuguese and half-German. Her grandfather was German. And very few people realized that back in the 1800s, there were immigrants from Germany to work in the, you know, the, probably, plantations. There were---in Kaua'i you still can find the old German Camp, the Polish Camp, the Korean Camp. Maui, they were more integrated. When you came up you passed Kēahua, Kēahua Camp. It was different from Kaua'i. Kēahua Camp they had all the races all living together.

JJ: And in Kaua'i they lived in separate camps?

JT: Well, from what I know, because I was very much involved in farming, I would take the tax maps of Kaua'i to find out what land was available that I could lease, and you know who owned the land and. . . . So that I would get no chances of they reneging on the leases after we get our crops. You know, sign non-revocable---gotta be non-revocable lease. So I got really to know the land. And it's amazing, that, you know, what I found that my grandfather was a kind man, this kind man because if he just wanted to amass wealth, he could have been a very wealthy man and he never did. (LT, Laverne Teves, enters room.) This is my wife. This is Jeanne.

LT: Hi.

JJ: Hi.

So let's see. So then where did you go to high school? On Kaua'i also?

JT: No, Honolulu.

JJ: Where did you go to school?

JT: Farrington [High School]. I never finished high school, because when we finally went—my father was very sickly. And when he went back Kaua'i, was his idea. We shouldn't have left Honolulu, because you got to know the big city, right? I got to know, you don't have to ride the horse anymore. In fact, you couldn't get in the road with the horse. So I keep picture, 1938, that's when I went there. And like how I was saying, first time, then came the depression. What you do with eight and three adopted kids? Still yet you had all these kids to raise.

LT: You guys want some watermelon?

JT: As the kids get older, they ask for different things. My mother---her family was very well off. Like you said, you live in Kailua. Then you familiar with Enchanted Lake estates. Did you hear the name Joe Pao? His mother and my mother are sisters. Nicholas Pao. When you drive from the airport to Honolulu, going back to town, when you reach Kalihi, look on the hill you see Kam[ehameha] School[s], okay? You go right up and you see Kam School. The reverse slope, is Pu'unui. To get up Pu'unui you gotta go up Liliha [Street], catch the bus you can catch the Pu'unui bus. My mother's father owned the whole shebang. Owned the whole mountain. And the view is just out of this world because you can look right into town, you know, Aloha Tower. And if you go up there, the main drag on the side of the hill is [tape inaudible] Street. And the street below that, Kaua'i Street. And then what happen is came the war. And because of the shift of people, defense workers and GI's, that always thought that maybe Honolulu, Hawai'i in general, was coconut trees and swaying hula girls and nothing else. And when they came and they seen, yeah, this is a beautiful place to live. Then everything caught on.

So then, on my father's side, had six girls and five boys, that's my father's family. On my mother's side had fourteen boys and three girls. My wife went to one *da kine*. The family is so vast. They were all Catholic; they never believe in birth control, okay? So, you familiar, in Honolulu, Kailua Park. They couldn't hold the reunion in Kailua Park; the park was too small. In fact, the last reunion we had, was nineteen. . . . This was in. . . . What church did we have that, what gym? Anyway, only the nice portion. And they said all first cousins, and what they have is you can, you have to have a shirt. And the shirt says what reunion, the number reunion, and the last number underneath is what—from the seventeen kids, on the seventeen fork—what number were you. And my mother was number nine. The only thing had two number nines because my mother and her brother John was twins. What this family did, when the old man died, he left equal shares to everybody of this place. That was a whole dairy. That was the Freitas Calistro dairy. And those days, when they used to deliver the milk was all horse and buggy, you know. But he first had one dairy in Kaua'i, and he sold the dairy and then he came, went to Honolulu and. . . .

So after the war break out and after the war was over, they formed one corporation. And they were very talented people. The Teves family and the Calistro. They was very talented. I'm not

tooting my horn. And they formed this corporation because they had all the talent in the family. They were good electricians, good plumbers, good carpenters. You name 'em they could do it. So they formed a corporation and they would put up homes. You would buy the property they would put up the home and they could do it all themselves because the talent was in the family.

When we moved from Kaua'i to Honolulu, we were dirt poor, okay? Those days, you don't take the plane. The planes was unsafe. So I think had the *Hualālai*, the boat *Hualālai*, and I think the *Wai'ale'ale*. And I think, I never forget what's—every time I laugh because my brother, Charlie, Albert and myself, we stayed in one room. And my one love was olives. I loved olives. So you just press the bell, and the steward would come. And this was one big Hawaiian guy—I said Hawaiian softly because he might find me—and he came and he said, “Yeah, what you want?”

I said, “I want olives.”

So he went and he brought me one big bowl olives. And I slurped it all, just like that. And I pressed the bell again. He came again. Said, “What you want?”

I said, “I want olives.”

I slurped the olives. And I really was one small kid. I was about ten years old, I think—1928—1938 I was ten years old. He came the third time, and he said—he brought the olives—and he said, “If you ring the bell again, I going break your mouth.”

(Laughter)

I couldn't let that happen 'cause I had to eat the olives. But anyway, and I'm carrying this rice bag 'cause we never had too much, you know, suitcases and stuff. And as I was going down the plank when reached the, you know Honolulu Harbor, the alarm went off in the rice bag. (Chuckles) I never forget that. Well, the family was so unique that they already had one house for us, furnished. With the ten kids. Was convenient, was right next to Saint Anthony School in Kalihi. And the school was on Pu'uhale Road, and it was Kaumuali'i Street. Okay, we stayed there. Unfortunately, there was a very, not so very good place to stay because, finally when the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, I seen the whole shebang. I seen all the works, yeah. So when you look at the show, *Tora, Tora, Tora*, the guy who made that show was something else. But we had---if you stayed Honolulu that long, you know that Salt Lake wasn't like that. In that time there, they had down the 'A'ala canal, 'A'ala Park. They had the base in there where the train would leave from. And those days they would haul pineapples on the train. And the people used to work, go work Pearl Harbor, they used to catch the train there. So, and the train, then the railroad tracks would go right through Salt Lake. Everything has changed over there. The railroad tracks go over the water.

And what we used to do is, go with nets over there and catch Samoan crab. Lot of crab over there. They get all fancy, got all this high rises over now, and the whole thing is changed. And that jailhouse was over there. O'ahu prison was over there next to Gaspro. So young kids couldn't afford nets, so what we used to do was take string about this long, and tied one floater on, take one can Spam and cut the Spam pieces like that, and tie the Spam on. And crabs are very hungry fellows and all you need is you get one scoop net. So when you find the floater, you lift the floater up slowly and the crab won't let go. And you put the net underneath and then that's a cheap crab, right? Because you never have to buy the net. But after the war, you know, they thought they had all the corpses. They never did. And we used to go down there and once we seen

this bloated body, was one young guy. And that's the last time I went catch crabs. So what I'm saying, they never did—as good a job they did—they never got all.

But the family formed the corporation, and that whole Pu'unui sold like hotcakes. And then, then my mother said, "Oh, . . ." We went through rough times, because my brother Joseph was a little boy then. And even then when the siren would go off, because they expect, even when the Midway battle was going on, every one of us knew that if they would pass, if they would take Midway, we would be next. And then my father, when we went Honolulu, my dad was working at Fort DeRussy in Waikīkī at that time. That's one army fort over there. He was a painter over there. And then my brother, Harold, he got one job in Pearl Harbor. And unfortunately, three months after he got the job, they bombed Pearl Harbor. And they kept saying on the radio, "You must report to your work place, this is by martial law."

And you know, we used to see maneuvers all the time and we see these round, so we seen these planes painted oranges on their wings because, you know they special group in maneuvers. But was the rising sun, the Japanese wing. And we all stayed---I remember the day well, because, you know, the kids that time. Only the main thoroughfare like King Street and Dillingham Boulevard, heavy traffic. The streets in between, Pu'uhale Road was heavy traffic. But hardly cars, only the people live there drive through there. So when we play agates we make the ring in the center of the road, you know. And we were playing agates, and we was wondering how come these planes fly so low. And the whole street over there was beautiful. Had all monkeypod trees and shade, all the street. But what happened was when the torpedo bombers would come in, you have to go down to about fifty feet over the water, you have to skid over the water to drop your torpedoes. And then you must use full power to bring 'em up again. So when they turned back up, they had to turn over Kalihi. Sound of the planes was right above the *da kine*. So if they decided to strafe the people on the road, they would kill 'em all.

And my mother said she wasn't happy. That's little too close to the main thoroughfare. And I don't know if you remember how old you were then, maybe you wasn't there, but there was Kam market there. If you go Kalihi Street and you go Kalihi Street all the way down to Dillingham, and there's two Billy Mitchell bombers, how sad that was. And I had this guy in my yard, Bobby Marks. And the two planes, you know two planes flying. One coming out of Hickam Field, and this one coming in and both pilots, saying, "The other guy going turn, the other guy going turn," nobody turn and whop in mid-air. And the plane went right down and hit directly on Dillingham Boulevard. And I remember running all the way down and I could see the pilot's like this. His flesh was burned off his bone, like this. And two of my classmates died, two twin sisters. So my mother never wanted to live there because everything was. . . . So the brothers told her, "Okay, Sis."

So they go up near King Street. And this was Factory Street. I don't know how old time you are in Honolulu, but King Street is near the old Kalihi Theatre. It's the next [Fort] Shafter side of the old Kalihi Theatre. And I can remember well, that particular December 7th, because I used to sell papers. And I had the Shafter corner, Fort Shafter, where the Red Hill and Fort Shafter where they would split. And that morning, after *da kine* I sold 700 papers. And for every fifteen cents I'd pinch five cents, and I was rich. Yeah?

So they had said, "Sis. . . ." That's one thing they were just like gold in my mother's family to us. They said okay, they took my mother up and they showed, and I liked this house. This house had all built-in shades, you know. All wooden shades built in to shade. Big red poinciana tree in the yard. All moss rock walls that go right around. They had one built bomb shelter behind the

yard underneath the mango tree. Unbelievable. This Alexia, she had fourteen brothers. And the three sisters was the jewels of the family. But my father was never happy. Home was Kaua'i.

JJ: What year did you move back to Kaua'i?

JT: And while he was still in Fort Ruger he had to crawl one place to repair one pipe and he developed double hernia. So he never was the same after that. Not so much because it was a major operation. But that particular time, surgery was not a very safe thing. So he would always say, yeah, he wanted to go back. So like what I said what day of 1946? Nineteen forty-six, my mother said—and my mother loved Honolulu. Because all she did was she could take the bus and go any which way, yeah? She never could do that in Kaua'i. And I used to tell her, "Mom, you don't have to go you know, he's copping out." And in Portuguese family, the husband, he's the boss. You know, even if he. . . .

So we went back, and they said no, she sell the place, "You can do whatever you want with the money." And then because my sister went back, they said, "Sis, if you want to cash out from the corporation," that was the mistake. You know what I mean? The corporation would give her her share. And at that time I think she had—I don't know—sixteen or twenty-six thousand. But that's big bucks at that time, yeah?

So we went back and I told Mom, when we go back now, already we never had place. The place goes for if you live Kaua'i, the place go to the next son. Once you establish residence, nothing was in deed form. In my mother's side, everything was in deed form. So then you know, I always look for one place. Said, "Mom, go and buy that now." My father always had excuses, that's not—he was finding for the perfect place. And there's no such thing, yeah? And slowly he start using the money here, and using the money there, using the money.

So then like I said, then I lost my two brothers. Both of my brothers drowned, and I'm the lone survivor of the boys, now. Charlie, the one that was adopted, he died in San Francisco. Albert, which is my best friend in life, he died. He was also in San Francisco. The only survivor is the girl, Margie, and I think she's someplace in Canada. So then. . . .

JJ: Where were you living in 1957, at the time of that tidal wave?

JT: [Nineteen] fifty-seven I was living in Kapahi. I was renting a house, and I already had three of my kids. I had Deborah, Jerome and Scott.

JJ: Do you remember what happened that day prior to the tidal wave?

JT: No was just, you know, any other day. In fact, that particular day, that's why I asked you if was it weekday or Sunday like that, because I remember I was in my office. And I'm a guy that I can ride a car and never put a radio on. But what made me put the radio on in my office that day was—and then I heard there has been a earthquake generated and there is a wave coming. And the wave was going hit so-and-so time.

And like I said, that's why I said you don't have a map. If you had a map, you would find that from Menehune Fishpond—Menehune Fishpond is in Nāwiliwili. It is where the harbor of Kaua'i. Where you fly in to Kaua'i the plane turns and you could look down Kalapakī Bay. You can see the---you'll see where the ships go Nāwiliwili. There's a Menehune Fishpond. That extends all the way to Hā'ena, where *Thornbirds*, that love scenes were made. I cannot tell you

the amount of rivers, okay. And it's unfortunate that you've taken this survey and that you never really go over there, because Kaua'i has the longest bridge in the state. The reason why—that bridge is just pass Kīlauea—the reason why that bridge is there, is because that bridge was once down by the ocean. Was beautiful to, *da kine*, look at. But it's even scarier what the tidal wave did. And I believe that's the one in '46. You know that giant pillars that brace the bridge that was there? She took that couple hundred yards up. So now they made that bridge way up far away from the sea, and it's the longest bridge in the state. And if you go on that bridge and you stop on that bridge and you look down. . . . Now, the area I'm talking about whenever we talk about Kīlauea, that was once all in cane, there was all C. Brewer [Company]. That was the first sugar plantation. When they started go out of business, that was the first. Today they have mostly farms through there. There were shows, they made waterfalls, where people slide down. They made, they have one over there.

So the reason I say this is every one of this rivers, I fished there. You know, we talking about cross net, and you know those days we never had outboard motor, yeah? So we bang, bang, bang bang, and so you take one pipe, and as you hit the water, the hollow part of the pipe make a booming sound underneath the water, and the fish move. So you set your nets—the river is maybe about hundred, at the narrowest, about hundred feet wide, at the widest maybe about hundred-fifty feet. So you, when you make your nylon nets, you made 'em, that. So you set the nets, like this, and then with modern times you have an outboard motor. So you just lift your blade over the net and you spin around like this, right? You lift the blade, you go. But those days, you don't. And the reward is great, if the mullet is in, you see all the floaters, all mullet is hooked on. If the *pāpio* is in, which is baby *uluas*, or the giant *awa*. So you never need to go to the market for fish. And I fished all the streams.

JJ: So the day of the tidal wave, though, in 1957, you were at work?

JT: I was at work. And when I heard the radio, I thought— because, right away I gotta check, right? My family all fishermen. So when I called my sister Aggie she was crying on the phone. Her name is Agnes. But from little kids we call her Aggie. And she said, "Frank went . . ." Frank is my brother-in-law. He went to set net the night before. And when you set net, you go at night, when the tide is low. And you set all your net on the *'āpapa*. Reef. Hawaiian is *'āpapa*. And nighttime as the tide come up, the lobster move, because they feed at night. So when the tide goes down in the morning, and the tide pull back, once the lobster touch the net, he's yours, he stays there. So you go when the tide goes low. So that's about the time the tide would be low. Is about the time the wave was gonna hit.

So then, gads, I gotta get outta here. So, I took off, back, and I had this, like I said, there's only one road going all the way to Hā'ena. So when I got down Keālia hill here, and right on the hill here, where the kids walk, you can go. There's a road that you can go in the side road here, they can go to the church. You come down, you make one right turn, and there's another road here that you can go up. And the church is over here. And all my life, as I sat in church, I always took the side pew over here. And like what I said, the youngest kid neighborhood have a penny and the older one would have a nickel, and I would kinda hang on to a nickel for dear life. I rather see I having the nickel than the bag, collection bag. And my mother would reach over and give 'em away. And I would not watch the Mass, I would be looking at the sea. So this became my very good friend, through all those years growing up. In fact, this cut here, I think I got this when I was seven years old. I went down to take confession, and I got down into here, I put my hand to one rock, one eel bit me. And the blood—seems I was bleeding to death, I ran out screaming my guts, eh? So this how I grew up, looking out at the church. And I had never seen this go dry. I

thought that I'd never see the day the ocean go dry.

So as I took off down to go to Kīlauea is like what I said, now it's all farm area. And lot of tourists over there. And that bridge I told you that they made 'em, is Kalihi Wai. The area is Kalihi Wai. It's a beautiful, beautiful place. But they never build any bridge around there. That's how we got the longest, Kaua'i got the longest bridge in the state. But anyway, so the police was all here. The cars were parked up in here and back up in the church here and they were walking by foot over here, stopping all traffic. Like I said this is the only road to go to. And you can figure how much tourists going through here. So they told the tourists go back here, and go in the parking lot of the church. Kapa'a School is right up here. So when go home, supposing you live Keālia, when you reach here, you would go down by the gym and there's a trail that goes down this hill here, yeah? Then you cross the road down here. So when I got down here, I still can remember my friend, Gary Matsumura. I couldn't get that the name wrong; he was policeman. He said, "You cannot get through, John. You cannot go. The wave going hit anytime now."

So then I told 'em, "Yeah, you know, my brother-in-law, probably picking up lobster net." And he was picking up lobster net in Kīlauea. Kīlauea, like I said, we don't have the map, but that was once all cane, and the name is Pīla'a channel. It's one of the most beautiful fishing areas that probably I would see in my life. And Mrs. Thomas King. . . . My brother-in-law, when she was in Honolulu, he would take care of her polo horses. The King---Mrs. King is from the Shingles' family, which in some way is tied up with the monarchy. So when you have money and you love beautiful beaches, you go to the state maps and see if anybody has that or if you can list them, providing you can pay the price. And she's in this beautiful white sand beach in this valley in this channel and she got it. And because my brother-in-law was really involved with polo ponies. So she told him, she told Frank, "You know I'm gonna make one house over here." So they had even brought the lumber down with dozers and they made a nice little cottage.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JT: . . . but there was no water. So this is where the wave took my brother-in-law. That's why I'm talking about this. So my brother-in-law told me, "John, you see that bamboo patch up there?" Was, oh, maybe about two hundred yards away on the hill. He said, "There's a spring in there," and he said, "I'm quite sure I can tap that spring for drinking water." Eventually we could use the house for weekends, you know, for family. So we had, oh, about—pretty, was pretty rough carrying that pipe down. But we put the pipe and we tap the spring so the house had fresh running water. Now, remind me to tell you about making the hole for the outhouse, when we're not being recorded, and I can tell you who I helped to dig the ass-hole. Ass, period H-O-L-E, okay?

But anyway, so that's where he went and set the lobster net. And to understand Kāhili, or that area from there extending to Kalihi Wai, you probably someday might see it for yourself. It has old volcano tubes that you don't know where the water go. When the water comes in, you can hear, hush, hushing, and puffing. And see just blow hole, you can see air blowing here, and you can hear the water goes underneath, sshhh. And you hear, poom, and the water back up like that. So you don't dare fall in there. It's, you know, like that. I know of guys who had fall in. And he never grew hair after that. But anyway, that's where they were gonna take the lobster net, and that's the house him and I got so involved and we spent so much hours there. Our family enjoyed

there. To be honest with you, the pictures not there, but the walls had the monarchy. Lili'uokalani, and I'll tell you why later on when I'm not on tape.

But anyway, the sea over there is very alive. Sea just rise and fall because the lava tubes. But this particular place by the wide channel. So Gary, the policeman, told me, "You cannot pass, the wave going hit." Now, between here and you go up the hill over here, it's about, I would say, about half mile. Today, this area we are inside here, we are in here, it's beautiful surface, all the surface even in here today. Anyways, so what I did, I walked back a little ways up this trail here. I would say about twenty-five feet, here. And the railroad track is over here. Okay? See the railroad track. You know it goes over the water. So when the train used to haul cane that's how they used to go. So I walked back here about twenty-five feet and the tourists that park on here. And again going over the hill, before Kapa'a School, there's the state hospital, and that was Mahelona [Memorial] Hospital. Was once a TB hospital. Beautiful place, but they have no TB cases nowadays. So they have, what you call, nursing homes for the aging, stuff like that, or mental people, I think. So I moved back up this trail and I said, "Gary."

He said, "No worry John. I going call the police over that side, and they'll alert your brother-in-law and we've got helicopters flying low with bullhorns, et cetera." That never happen. But anyway, so I went back. Being brave and young, I went back about twenty-five feet from this trail and all that tourists that had parked, I think, was back behind me. And, for the first time I got to respect the sea. Because suddenly, the sea became alive, and you can see you know the pumping action. More like one washing machine. The water just pump like this. Pump! And then where the water is blue and smooth, you get all this foam. All white water. And the sea start receding, okay? And had this horse tied here. Not on the tracks but on the side, and the guy put one five-gallon water and had grass. And how amazing how animals can sense danger. Having grown up with horses, the horse kept—you know you get those sharp look in his eye and he kept putting his ears back, like that. And nobody would dare run down in this area here and to untie the horse. But the horse generated so much strength that he break the rope and everybody said, "Yeah!" Well, like how I told you, my grandfather wants the payroll. And the boats would come in, yeah? The big transport would park up there and he would get guards go over here and wait for the payroll. And the payroll, the money would come in the boxes. So there's a connection here. This is where I used to sit in church and I cut the finger, okay?

Well, I never know how the bottom of this ocean look like but believe me, from this point, right about here, you can draw line, was dry ground. For the first time I seen the bottom of the sea. And then the same pumping action going back. Start coming in. The only thing is, when the hell that pumping action going stop. So being young and brave, I held my ground. But all the tourists that walked down the trail, turned around and ran. And I seen them crossing the parking lot over here. (Someone enters.) It's my grandson. And still running up here to the pine trees. I mean they not going stop and they don't know how high they was. So I had second thoughts, am I high enough? And this, like what I said, this is the river going up here. And right in one little knoll here, is the Silva property. Manuel Silva. That's where his house. And he had all hog pens all through here. And big chicken coops all in here. And what was attractive he raise leghorns which was all white. And you know all the cows, Holstein cows in this pasture here. Well, you know, the reason the tourists start running back is this bridge is not a low bridge. It's a high bridge. It's at least I would say about twenty, twenty-five feet from the ground. And that wave came and went over the bridge. But that's how the rivers act as a funnel, they take the brunt of the water as the water rush in. Across the road here is all—this was plantation camp. There were nobody here, they all long gone. But over here was pine trees. But suddenly you see all this chicken coops (chuckles) just go with the water. And you see hogs swimming every which way, they desperate.

So as soon as the water lift them up they going already with their feet. You see up here. And like I said, this water, this river, it goes about quarter mile up here and then it turns like this. And it kept going. The wave kept going and going, going. By over here, it broadened out, you know what I mean. And then it turned up here. That gave the animals a little time. The fast moving, probably the younger cows, could make it.

Then when this water coming back, it's coming back the second wave came a little faster. So what happened, when the second wave coming, this is all full already. So the second wave is bucking this. So the animals had more time. Lot of pigs made it this side here, and back through here. The chickens never had no chance. Slowly, as the chicken houses start broking up, you see the white and then they disappeared. Because there's currents underneath, eh?

And the third wave was almost as big as the first wave. By this time I was on top here (chuckles). I was on top, at least hundred feet above the road. No tourist was near me, they were gone. They were back here climbing this hill back here. And, you know afterwards was funny, you have to laugh. Had seven waves. But after the third, everything was downhill. Then Gary told me, "Okay, John you can go now." So I took off. And I think from here to that point, maybe it's about fourteen miles. There was another cop over there, I think his name was Chu, I'm kinda foggy on his. But he went down. So when I was walking back there, then I seen my brother-in-law, he was all bust up. All skin all. But he was alive. All the skin gone. No more nets. No nets, the nets is all long ones. We had 1,400 feet, 1,400 feet of lobster net. And they had this old man's Severino with him. Severino is long dead. But my brother-in-law is still alive and is eighty-four. He was here. In fact he was here last week. He's an old *paniolo*. So every year when have the rodeo, Makawao rodeo, he comes here. He was in the---he was riding in one—I had to laugh because he was riding in one new Mustang convertible, black convertible. They had one big sign said, Old *Paniolos*. (Chuckles) All gray guys. But he's still there. So someday you go Kaua'i you can talk.

So they were bust up but they were alive. And what saved them is, okay, they already took the lobster nets out, and they piled the lobster nets above the sand. But while taking out the nets, they seen that there was lot of fish out there. So they take, they throw net, and when the old man ran out, you know, watching for fish, and like I said, he's very ocean-wise. Frank, he's very ocean-wise. Not that he was an expert on tidal waves. But when you in the water, up to your waist, and suddenly you in, you know, there's no water, something's wrong. So he told his old man Severino—this Severino was retired already—"Come. Hold this net." So he had one twenty-pound throw net, *tsuji* net. He had---and that old man had locked his fingers in the *tsuji* and he said, "We go." And they start running outside. (Chuckles) They were maybe about two hundred from ocean, the wave picked them up. Tidal wave.

JJ: They went out to—into the water?

JT: No, the wave was moving in. So they never made but that old man he locked on that net, yeah? So the wave picked them up. And to understand over there, say, this is the sand like this, yeah? And many, many years ago, the people who go down the beach they like go camping like. So they always arrange to do things. Not like today, they didn't do anything. They maybe cut down the trees. So, you know what is a Christmas berry tree, okay. They planted Christmas berry trees almost one hedge row all like this. And I don't know who planted this but even if you go up the mountain, you notice that if you hungry in Kaua'i, somebody many, many years ago made one orange grove. So if you reach there and you hungry, you can eat oranges or *liliko'is* or something like that. And these trees now, these trees I'm talking about, were in the area of maybe about fifteen, twenty years. Perfect round trees, about fifteen feet. The wave threw them over the trees.

And when the wave suck back, the net stucked on the tree, you know one twenty-foot net. And they hanged up. And they hanged up on the tree, like that. And that old man was still locked on that net. So they jumped down and said, "Let's go to high ground." They got busted up but they survived.

JJ: Wow, that's great.

JT: And the house that we had put up, with all that fancy pictures, I told you, I don't want to put on tape. He said was just like a matchbox. The wave took 'em out, and took 'em in the valley, and he couldn't see the house. The house tangle up the valley. And then afterwards, when the wave suck 'em the house. . . . So like a little matchbox, you take a matchbox and press back. It just shatter. And he said then he seen the lumber all in the water. And the lady I going tell you about that I was involved digging the outhouse hole, she was some type of diver. And she had all this fancy gear. Those days never had scuba gear. You know, regular. But she was quite a swimmer. And you going be surprised who she was. But anyway, thank goodness. And then since they were fine, you know, I was totally relieved. And they said this guy said, "No, John, I called Agnes already." He called my sister.

So then since I got time, I always heard that tidal waves, you can get lot of free fish. So I went down and the valley, I told you earlier that we had went up this bamboo patch and tapped *da kine*, the wave went in, all the way up the valley. And the first wave that came in, that caught all the fish by surprise, that's the one, the first wave. When it goes all the way up, in the valley end, the grass curls like this, yeah? And when I went back and turned the curled grasses, you name the fish and it was there. For the first time in my life, I never take rubbish fish. I pick the *kūmū*, the *menpachi*. I never care for the big *ulua*. I wanted the good frying size *pāpio*. The *moi*. *Manini*, who wants *manini*? *Palani* or *kala*? Who wants that fishes? I took two bags fish. You can tell my wife. And I took 'em home, and I dumped 'em in my front yard. I went throughout the neighborhood and said, "You guys want fish?" It was gone like that. (Snaps fingers.) I never ate anything. You must ask me why.

JJ: Why?

JT: Kaua'i is known for its large rats. Norway rat. The HSPA [Hawai'i Sugar Planters' Association], the sugar plantations. . . . There's no mongoose in Kaua'i. You know, Maui and O'ahu has mongoose. Unfortunately, the rat is a, you know, land animal. But the tidal wave never cared. So as---so along with the fish, some rats are giving their last kicks. Some are all shriveled up like this, shaking. I couldn't eat *da kine*. And my wife said, "You give it all away." I said when I tell you why. But they weren't contaminated, you know, they were good-eating fish. But how like that, you have your choice. You take only gourmet food, fish. *Moi, moi* is a king's fish. But I respected the sea since then.

JJ: Well, thank you John, very, very much for allowing me to record you.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS IN MAUI COUNTY:
Oral Histories**

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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